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[Return to Metro](#)

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[E-mail this story](#)[Comment on this story](#)[Previous story](#) [Next story](#)

SITE INDEX

[Homepage](#)
[Search](#)
[CyberSurveys](#)
[News Talk](#)
[Sports Talk](#)
[Lions Talk](#)
[Tiger Talk](#)
[Wings Talk](#)
[Car Talk](#)
[Tech Talk](#)
[Horoscope](#)
[Hot Sites](#)
[Lottery](#)
[Weather](#)
[Staff](#)

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[Autos](#)
[Joyrides](#)
[Business](#)
[Careers](#)
[Census](#)
[Columnists](#)
[Commuting](#)
[Detroit History](#)
[Editorials](#)
[Health](#)
[Metro / State](#)
[Livingston](#)
[Macomb](#)
[Oakland](#)
[Wayne](#)
[On Detroit](#)
[Nation / World](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Death Notices](#)
[Politics / Govt.](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[Religion](#)
[Schools](#)
[Special Reports](#)
[Technology](#)

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[Lions/NFL](#)
[Pistons/NBA](#)
[Red Wings/NHL](#)
[Shock/WNBA](#)
[Tigers/Baseball](#)
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[U-M](#)
[More Colleges](#)
[Golf Guide](#)
[High Schools](#)
[Motor Sports](#)
[More Sports](#)
[Outdoors](#)
[Scoreboards](#)

ENTERTAINMENT

House: No lakes drilling

Vote seen as part of GOP trend bucking Bush in support of protecting environment

By **Jeremy Pearce, and Gebe Martinez / The Detroit News**

WASHINGTON -- A federal measure that would severely hamper drilling for gas and oil under the Great Lakes was passed by the House Thursday, further upsetting President Bush's plans for tapping more of Michigan's underwater energy resources.

The measure, hailed by environmentalists, was an amendment to an energy and water-spending bill that is still subject to Senate approval. The vote was part of an emerging pattern of Republicans bucking the administration in support of steps to protect the environment.

A parallel political battle is taking place in Lansing, where Republicans led by Gov. John Engler are pushing for broader state energy exploration.

The renewed national effort to use domestic oil raises local questions about stricter federal controls over Great Lakes waters, long-term damage to the environment and even political fallout on the Michigan governor's race in 2002.

"Why should we take any risks with the Great Lakes?" asked Dennis Fijalkowski of the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation, which opposes all local oil exploration.

"We're talking about 20 percent of the world's fresh water. We have to err on the side of caution here."

The measure approved by the U.S. House Thursday was an amendment introduced by Michigan Democrat David Bonior that in effect would block the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from setting aside funds to issue new drilling permits for oil reserves beneath the lakes. The vote was bipartisan and drew 70 Republicans.

Bonior, who is preparing a run for the Michigan governorship on an

CyberSurvey

A federal measure that would severely hamper drilling for gas and oil under the Great Lakes was passed by the House Thursday. What do you think of the bill?

- ☐ It's good. The lakes must be protected.
☐ We need more oil exploration.
☐ It should be left to the Great Lakes states.
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2000).

environmentalist platform, framed the issue in terms of protecting the state's water supplies.

"I remind my colleagues that one quart of oil can contaminate up to two million gallons of drinking water," Bonior declared during the debate.

The majority of Michigan's 16-member Congressional delegation supported Bonior's amendment. Only Republican Reps. Joe Knollenberg of Farmington Hills, Mike Rogers of Brighton and Nick Smith of Battle Creek opposed the anti-drilling measure.

For Rogers, a former state senator, the issue wasn't so much about drilling for energy and protecting water resources as about the rights of states like Michigan to make their own decisions concerning natural resources.

"I trust our governor and the legislature to do the right thing," Rogers said. "Let's not flex our muscle and tell those (state) legislatures 'You don't really know what you are doing here.' "

In Michigan, that has been part of the debate as well. "The federal government doesn't have jurisdiction," declared Susan Shafer, Engler's press secretary.

It isn't clear what will happen to the Bonior amendment once the bill reaches the Senate. But Michigan Democratic Sens. Debby Stabenow and Carl Levin have been joined by other Great Lakes senators in backing a bill to require comprehensive studies of drilling. With Democrats in control of the Senate, the measure is likely to come to the floor for a vote.

Some state lawmakers argue that drilling technology is reliable enough to protect Great Lakes water and that tapping underwater energy deposits would provide a better and cheaper alternative to importing foreign oil.

"We agree there have to be standards. Our safeguards will be so stringent that drilling will be safe," said state Sen. Bill Schuette, R-Midland, whose constituency borders Lake Michigan.

Last month, state senators allowed for Great Lakes drilling permits in a spending bill, only to have the proposal deleted by the state House. Bills remaining in the state Senate and House would establish outright drilling bans.

And yet, acknowledged state Sen. Gary C. Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, author of one of the bans, "a permanent ban has been a very hard sell." He added: "We're not paying attention to the wishes of the vast majority of Michigan residents."

Supporters of drilling have been buoyed by findings of the Michigan Environmental Science Board, appointed by Engler to study the feasibility of directional drilling, which energy companies use to reach underwater oil and gas deposits from shorelines. Platform drilling directly over Michigan waters has been outlawed since the 1980s.

The science board has tentatively endorsed directional drilling -- with reservations.

"Any gas or oil well is going to have some leaks, likely at the well's head," said Dr. David T. Long, a Michigan State University geologist who headed the drilling panel. "And when you have a leak there is some chance it will get into the lake."

No new coastal drilling has taken place since 1997, the year Michigan adopted an unofficial moratorium. The Michigan Department of Natural

Resources, which has oversight of underground mineral rights, is now revising state regulations for leasing lake bottomlands.

DNR officials expect those revisions to be completed this year--opening the door for public auctions of leases and the extraction of gas and oil.

Other reactions to the Washington vote were mixed. State Atty. Gen. Jennifer Granholm said "there is some ambiguity " about whether the Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction in Michigan's waters. She said the Bonior vote "doesn't do any harm" and may help resolve a jurisdictional question.

The House vote was the second such setback for Bush. Last week, members called for a six-month drilling ban in the Gulf of Mexico near the Florida coast -- a measure supported by Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, the president's brother.

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